Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is almost impossible to study Shakespeare and his plays by obliterating the past. In order to evaluate the contribution of the ‘New Critics’, their predecessors, A. C. Bradley and E. E. Stoll have to be highlighted. This present work proposes to distinguish the contribution that is significant, in the field of Shakespeare criticism from that which is trivial. During the past century or so, the three major trends or approaches that superimposed the world of Shakespeare criticism, have been identified by scholars and historians as such: Bradley’s nineteenth century naturalistic approach with an obsession for character analysis; the contention of Stoll to restore Shakespeare to his Elizabethan background and the theatre, which was branded by the critics as a ‘realist reaction’, towards the earlier excessive character analysis and the ‘true to life’ approach; and finally, the upsurge of one of the major trends in understanding Shakespeare’s cosmic vision in the form of the ‘New Critics’. This was an absolutely new phase that emerged in the early 1930s and it aimed to end the traditional values in Shakespeare criticism.
This recent trend in Shakespeare criticism gave a new turn, from an interest in character and plot, to the study of images and symbols in Shakespeare's plays. This upsurge has also been regarded as reaction to the historical and theatrical scholarship. Shakespeare the dramatist had been lost so that Shakespeare the poet could live.

The present work is an endeavor to examine the unique characteristic contributions of each of these major tendencies and also to concentrate on their strengths and their weaknesses. It is intended in Chapter-I not precisely to present the commentary on the Shakespearean critical scene, but also to highlight those critics and their movements that have caused the turning points in the history of Shakespeare criticism. Further, the distinction has been made clear between the different schools of thought: the romantic criticism, which considers Shakespeare as divorced from his age and original theatre, then the school which concerns itself with the Elizabethan Shakespeare and with the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre, and the school of the new critics with the focus in Shakespeare's studies on image and symbolism. These scholars and scribes who have all written about Shakespeare, belong to different nation and have written at different times as well. But the stress in this chapter has been to outline the main
Preface

approaches and to mention individual contribution only if they have emerged as a factor to reckon with.

Most importantly, immense consequence has been attached to the need to trace the past history of Shakespeare’s review because unless we look in retrospect the present cannot be projected.

Chapter-II of this study concerns itself with the comparative study of Hamlet. Some very exceptional writings from almost every significant critical approach have been assimilated, into the vast critical range of this play. Hence, out of all the plays that Shakespeare has written, Hamlet has been sorted out specifically. Hamlet has become a specimen here or rather a ‘test case’, in order to evaluate the depth and quality of the work of Bradley, Stoll and Wilson Knight. The problem of Hamlet has been made into an enigma by Bradley and the romantic critics, which Stoll has tried to answer. Hence Bradley’s main contender in this regard is Stoll, whereas the New Critics have presented their own interpretation of Hamlet, through decoding the imagery and symbol used in the play. Bradley and Stoll’s contention have been more intensely and earnestly probed due to the conceptual issues involved in their variegated doctrines and practices.
As the very appellation of chapter-III suggests, ‘Reinterpreting Bradley’, is an attempt to evaluate Bradley according to the twenty first century perspective and also an endeavor to repair some of the damage done to Bradley’s, *Shakespearean Tragedy*. But whenever we discuss the present the past cannot be erased, hence a discussion of the wholesale rejection of Bradley that becomes a concern of most of the scholars after the 1930s will also be elucidated.

E.E. Stoll considered to be the main opponent of Bradley and branded as a historical critic is highlighted in Chapter-IV Stoll’s specific contribution to the criticism of Shakespeare is illuminated and a definite endeavor has been made by the present study and research to justify Stoll’s exceptional contribution and also to acquire a place for him as one of the eminent critics of Shakespeare. It is also one of the contentions of this work to present Stoll’s real objective in all of his writings.

The Chapter-V of this study is an attempt to trace the rise of the poetic approach. Exactly as Stoll’s writings were considered only a reaction to the 19th century naturalistic mode of interpretation similarly the New Critics were alleged to have emerged in response to the extreme display of character depiction by Coleridge and Bradley. It is the
undertaking of this work to present an analysis regarding all such issues. Undoubtedly, the advent of this particular approach had a solid reason to have emerged. Although some deliberation and manipulation might have been made by the proponents to displace the two other major approaches of Bradley and Stoll. Nevertheless this new criticism brought evolution and progress in its wake, and was not a mere divergence from orthodox criticism. The contribution of G. Wilson Knight, L.C. Knight and Caroline Spurgeon has been discussed briefly and the main points elaborated.

The last chapter of this work enumerates the conclusion in which the analysis that has been observed during the study of the above critical schools and their contributions that have been the subject of this work are summed up in brief.